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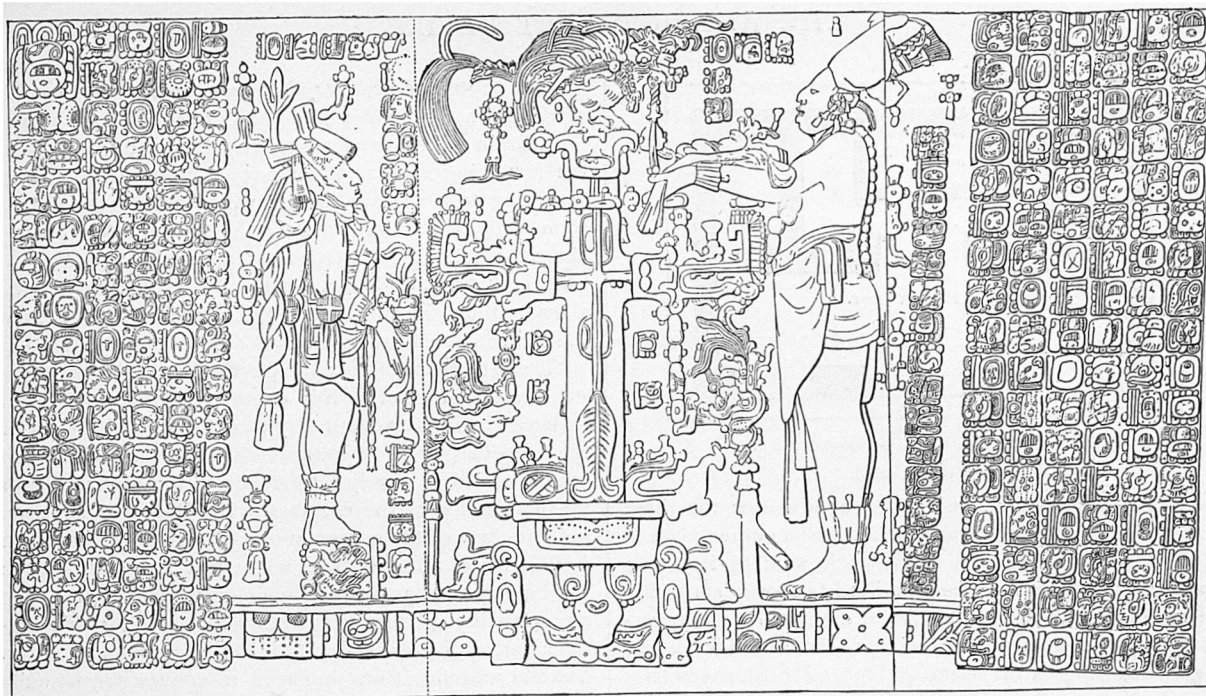
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THE PALENQUEAN GROUP OF THE CROSS.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

THE GROUP OF THE CROSS AT PALENQUE.

THE PALENQUE TABLET in the *United States National Museum, Washington, D. C.* By CHARLES RAU. Washington City: Published by the Smithsonian Institution. 1879. ix + 81 pp. Illustrated with Plates and Figures in the Text. 4to. (Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge, 331.)

ALMOST every one who visits the National Museum in Washington has his attention arrested by a framed slab, measuring about 6 by 3 feet, and covered in low relief with characters resembling large seals. It has frequently attracted archaeologists, and recently has been figured and described by Dr. Charles Rau, in an illustrated quarto pamphlet published by the Smithsonian Institution, in which the learned author gives us the history of the sculpture so far as known.

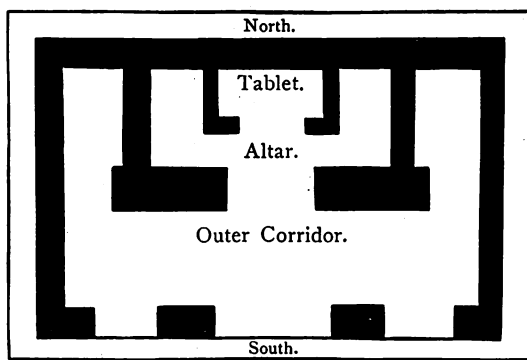
This slab was formerly the right-hand piece of a wainscoting in the Temple of the Cross at Palenque, called the Group of the Cross. The ruins of Palenque, named after the village of Santo Domingo del Palenque, about eight miles distant, are situated in the state of Chiapas, Mexico, near the border of Guatemala. The aboriginal name is not known. Among the noble edifices which once adorned this temple site was one now called the Temple of the Cross, standing upon a dilapidated pyramidal stone structure, near the right bank of the river Otolum. In ground plan it is oblong, 53 by 31 feet; the north wall was blank, and against it in the middle the Group of the Cross was set. A small dark room, like a Holy of Holies, with a door facing south, enclosed the group. The remaining space in the temple was divided into two winged corridors, the outer much larger, with doors opening south.

In elevation the temple is forty feet high, the upper portion being much narrower and shorter than the lower, and reached by gradines from the top of the wall of the lower story. The walls are ornamented with grotesque stucco figures, plants, and flowers.

Although other sculptures adorn the interior of the edifice, the chief attraction centres upon the Group of the Cross.¹ According to Juarros, the ruins of Palenque were discovered in 1750 by a party of Spaniards, but Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg places the discovery as early as 1746. In the years between 1773 and 1784, Ramon de Ordoñez y Aguiar induced one of his brothers to visit the ruins, from whose account he drew up a report, and Bernasconi, the royal architect of Guatemala, was ordered to continue the survey.

Captain Antonio del Rio, in 1787, explored the ruins, and his manuscripts were sent to Spain, with many drawings. Copies having been retained in Mexico and Guatemala, Dr. McQuay obtained one of them and sent it to London, where it was printed by Henry Berthoud in 1822, and illustrated by 17 lithographic plates by M. F. de Waldeck, after copies from Castañeda, an artist who drew for Dupaix, the next explorer. Captain William Dupaix, accompanied by Luciano Castañeda as draughtsman, in 1805-1808, by order of the Mexican government, made three expeditions for the exploration of the antiquities of Mexico, in the third of which he examined Palenque. The manuscripts and drawings were deposited in the Museum of Mexico, and were published in Lord Kingsborough's *Mexican Antiquities*, the text in Vols. V. and VI., Castañeda's drawings, 34 plates relating to Palenque, in

¹ See the illustration above, which is a reduction of one of the plates in Dr. Rau's work.



TEMPLE OF THE CROSS. — GROUND PLAN.
(After Stephens.)

Vol. IV. Dupaix was the last writer who saw the three slabs in place, as they appear in Dr. Rau's outline plate.

In 1832, Jean Frédéric de Waldeck went to Palenque and built himself a hut, where he lived two years surveying and drawing the ruins. He found the middle slab, representing the cross, torn from its place, and the right one in fragments, lying on the chamber floor. Mr. Stephens tells us (1840), that "the middle slab was removed many years ago by one of the inhabitants of the village; but after great labor, and with no other implements than the arms and hands of the Indians and poles cut from the trees, when it had advanced to the bank of the stream, its removal was arrested by an order from the government." In this position it was copied by Waldeck and his successors, and there it now lies. Waldeck's sketches were published in Paris in 1866, under the title *Monuments Anciens du Mexique*, edited by De Bourbourg.

In 1840, Mr. James L. Stephens, accompanied by Mr. F. Catherwood as artist, surveyed the ruins, and gives a graphic description of them in his two great works entitled *Incidents*, etc. Stephens describes the fragments of the right-hand slab as lying about the adytum. These fragments reached Washington in 1842, having been sent by Mr. Charles Russell, our Consul at Laguna.

Mr. Arthur Morelet spent a fortnight among the ruins in 1846, and published, in 1857, his *Voyage dans l'Amérique Centrale*, etc., which was translated into English, in 1871, by Mrs. E. G. Squier. Finally, in 1857, M. Désiré Charnay was sent by the French government to explore the ruins of America, and published in Paris, in 1863, a work entitled *Cités et Ruines Américaines*, etc.

In 1848, Mr. Clark Mills made a cast of the slab, after restoring it, for Baron von Gerolt, to be deposited in the Berlin Museum. In 1858, it was transferred from the Patent-Office, where it had been deposited by the National Institute, to the Smithsonian Institution. In 1863, Dr. George A. Matile made a cast for Prof. Henry, and, while working upon it, recognized the slab as one of the three which composed the famous Group of the Cross described by authors anterior to Waldeck, and published a notice of his discovery in Barnard's *American Journal of Education*, January, 1868. After various accidents, the sculpture is now restored from Matile's cast, and set in a strong frame in the National Museum. In 1873, Dr. Valentini, not knowing of Dr. Matile, rediscovered the fact that it is a part of the Palenque group.

The interest in this thought-inspiring sculpture is about equally divided between the allegory in the centre and the hieroglyphs surrounding it.

On a grotesque head stands a cross enclosing the shaft of an arrow, with wings like the hilt of a rapier. Along the margin of the cross are many elaborate devices filling the remaining spaces. On the top is a bird (the quetzal, according to Dr. Rau), before which a man is offering something resembling an infant. On the left stands a shorter person, more gorgeously appressed, seeming to bear in his right hand a torch. The remainder of the slabs on the right and left, as well as the vacant spaces in the centre, are covered with lines of hieroglyphics.

The occurrence of the cross has awakened the profoundest interest, and not a little controversy. The weight of authority inclines to the theory that this symbol stands for the creative powers of nature; although Dr. Brinton and others see in it merely a reference to the four winds, or the four points of the compass. Dr. Rau thus sums up his own view of the matter at the close of Chapter IV.: "Until better informed, one might feel inclined to see in the Palenquean bas-relief a monument commemorative of a propitiatory sacrifice to the rain-god, made perhaps during a period of great suffering arising from want of water. Yet the meaning it was intended to convey may be quite different, and will not positively be known until the purport of the accompanying characters ceases to be a mystery."

That mystery, however, is still very far from being solved. In 1863, De Bourbourg discovered in the Royal Library at Madrid a copy of a manuscript composed by Bishop de Landa, who died in Yucatan in 1579; and published it with a French translation in 1864. This description contains delineations of the signs which the natives employed in writing. Attempts to interpret the Palenque hieroglyphs by means of this alphabet have been made by De Bourbourg, Charency, Leon de Rosny, and others, but in vain. Dr. Rau, whose fifth chapter is entitled *Aboriginal Writing in Mexico, Yucatan, and Central America*, shows by his own conclusions the unsatisfactory state in which this important question is still left. "The analogies," he says, "which I have shown to exist between Landa's signs and the glyphs on the Palenquean bas-relief are in so far of interest as they seem to explain, if nothing else, at least the general purport of the latter. Considering that signs, or parts of signs, for months, and more particularly such as denote days, occur, in conjunction with numbers expressed by bars and dots, on the Tablet of the Cross, I venture to suggest that its inscription constitutes a *chronological* record of some kind. The central group of figures probably illustrates one of the events narrated or indicated by the surrounding glyphs."

The attempt of Dr. Rau to reconstruct the central and left-hand slabs from drawings, photographs, and descriptions, reveals the great allowance to be made in all works of this character for the "personal equation." In general terms, the personal equation is the difference between what is and what is reported, and increases in complexity proportionally as we remove the result of observation from mechanical appliances. The artist's "equation" will involve, not merely his skill of hand and nicety of vision, but his control over his poetic fancy, and the ability to put himself in the place of the original workman, with his undeveloped ideas and his stone implements for expressing them. Dr. Rau's pages bear additional testimony to the fact that, of all the drawings made from the Palenquean group, those by Catherwood are by far the most reliable.

OTIS T. MASON.